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Creed, Cabal, or Conspiracy – The Origins of the current Neo-Conservative Revolution in US Strategic Thinking

*By Ebrahim Afsah**

A. Introduction

Americans usually start a presentation with a joke, Germans usually with an apology, Russians with a complaint, and Middle Easterners often with a conspiracy theory. There are many reasons why Middle Easterners have been more prone to conspiracies than others. The psychology of conspiracy is complex, and merits a separate treatment. But part of the answer must lie in the fact that for much of its modern history the Middle East has been at the mercy of external forces¹ whose decisions were not only beyond the control of indigenous populations and elites, but moreover appeared unfathomable to those unfamiliar with the way political and strategic decisions are made in the West.

So it might not be all that surprising that, when faced with an overwhelming but incomprehensible reality dramatically affecting one's personal life, one seeks solace in the soothing simplicity of an all-encompassing reference system. The conspiracy theory explains all and satisfies the psychological need to make sense of the complexities of modern life. What is surprising, however, is that transatlantic relations have degenerated to such a low level, that increasingly people in Europe turn to conspiracy theories to explain what went wrong.

Leaving aside the lunatic fringe² for a moment, there is large and growing number of commentators who view the present transatlantic tensions as but the work of a

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¹ Ever since the French under Napoleon were defeated by the English in 1803 at Aboukir, all the major decisions affecting the Middle East have been taken abroad.

² See, e.g., THIERRY MEYSSAN, 11 SEPTEMBER 2001: L'EFFROYABLE IMPOSTEUR (2002), ANDREAS VON BÜLOW, IM NAMEN DES STAATES (2000). ANDREAS VON BÜLOW, DIE CIA UND DER 11. SEPTEMBER. INTERNATIONALER TERROR UND DIE ROLLE DER GEHEIMDIENSTE (2003); MATHIAS BRÖCKERS, VERSCHWÖRUNGEN, VERSCHWÖRUNGSTHEORIEN UND DIE GEHEIMNISSE DES 11. 9. (2003).

small clique of ideologues who took an academically challenged presidency hostage to their radical agenda. Much of current academic and popular debate on the eastern side of the Atlantic has a ring of self-righteousness and *schadenfreude* about it. The stupendous commercial success of Michael Moore's book *Stupid White Men* in Europe lies not so much in its ability to teach us something about an America which we find ever harder to fathom. Rather it is feeding into European prejudices about this dominant and domineering country and allows us the soothing illusion of moral superiority against a 'redneck' "culture of death"³, where everyone totes a gun and blacks are framed and executed by a racist criminal justice system.

It seems safe to assume that things would be easier if Europeans were currently dealing with President Gore and his officials instead. And given the type of rhetoric being employed by the current administration it is likewise not all that difficult to understand that Senator Hilary Clinton's recent European book tour raised exuberant hopes about her presidential aspirations. But I maintain that such hopes of returning to an essential harmony of interest and values recognized in a spirit of partnership and consultation, are mistaken. Kagan is definitely on to something when he writes that: "today's transatlantic problem ... is not a George Bush problem."⁴ By pointing to the *structural* sources of conflict he forces us to confront the notion that a small group of ideologues have successfully conspired to pursue an American Empire.

The influential German weekly *Der Spiegel* expressed the widespread consternation at the increasingly far-fetched reasons given for the impending war against Iraq by pointing to Bush's ideologically driven policy advisers: "It was the exact opposite of a conspiracy. In broad daylight ultra-rightwing US think-tanks were as early as 1998 drawing up plans for an era of American global domination, for the emasculation of the UN, and an aggressive war against Iraq. They weren't taken seriously for a long time. In the meantime the hawks in the Bush administration are calling the shots."⁵

This group of policy advisors and practitioners are seen as few in number, well-connected, highly motivated, ideologically driven, anti-establishment, ruthless and illegitimate. Often they are referred to as a "cabal," namely a "group of persons

³ ROBERT KAGAN, *OF PARADISE AND POWER: AMERICA AND EUROPE IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER* 1 (2003).

⁴ *Id.*, at 5.

⁵ Jochen Bölsche, *Bushs Masterplan - Der Krieg, der aus dem Think Tank kam*, DER SPIEGEL (4 March 2003) at <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,238643-2,00.html>>; as well as <http://www.societyofcontrol.com/archive/htm_pdf/boelsche_think_tank_bereitete_den_irak_krieg_vor.htm>.

secretly united to bring about an overturn or usurpation especially in public affairs.”⁶ This group of neo-conservatives proved their mettle in the Reagan and Bush Sr. administrations, and then hibernated in various think-tanks⁷ during the Clinton days. There they honed their ideas and created effective networks, only to emerge with a *prêt-à-porter* blue-print of how to radically reshape American foreign and security policy and to achieve global hegemony in the process.

This is not the place to re-open the debate on the justifications for the Iraq war, and whether the reasons given for going to war (weapons of mass destruction?) might have been simply the smallest common denominator to muster political support for a policy that had long before been decided.⁸ Likewise, the arduous process of piecing together the truth about intelligence reports that seem to have been “sexed

⁶ “The artifices and intrigues of a group of persons secretly united to bring about an overturn or usurpation especially in public affairs; also: a group engaged in such artifices and intrigues.” MERRIAN-WEBSTER ONLINE, <<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=cabal>>.

⁷ The best known is certainly the *Project for a New American Century*. “Established in the spring of 1997, the *Project for the New American Century* is a non-profit, educational organization whose goal is to promote American global leadership. *The Project* is an initiative of the *New Citizenship Project*. William Kristol is chairman of *the Project*, and Robert Kagan, Devon Gaffney Cross, Bruce Jackson and John R. Bolton serve as directors. Gary Schmitt is executive director of the Project.” See, THOMAS DONELLY, ET AL., *REBUILDING AMERICA’S DEFENSES - STRATEGY, FORCES AND RESOURCES FOR A NEW CENTURY* (September 2000), 2. The report can be found at <<http://www.newamericancentury.org/RebuildingAmericasDefenses.pdf>>. The other famous think-tanks associated with the current neo-conservative ascendancy are the American Enterprise Institute, <<http://www.aei.org>>; the Hudson Institute, <<http://www.hudson.org>>; and the somewhat more orthodox Cato Institute, <<http://www.cato.org>>.

⁸ During an interview with Sam Tannenhaus of VANITY FAIR magazine Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz made the following remark: “The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason. The truth is that for reasons that have a lot to do with the U.S. government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason.” See, <<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030509-depsecdef0223.html>>. The Pentagon tried subsequently to accuse Mr. Tannenhaus as having misquoted Mr. Wolfowitz, but the transcript clearly shows that he had been accurately paraphrased. For a comparison of the official transcripts and Pentagon counterstatements, see, <<http://www.digitalmediatree.com/onelap/references/22502/>> (“[L]et me paraphrase his comments on the ‘motive’ question based on the text of the VANITY FAIR interview transcript (linked above). There were three main reasons: 1) WMD, 2) links to terrorism, and 3) Saddam was bad for Iraq. Number three didn’t justify an invasion. Number two was weak. Number one was something we could get people to rally around. Also, the hidden agenda was to remove a threat to the ‘friendly governments’ in the region, and to satisfy bin Laden’s demand that we vacate Saudi Arabia.”).

up,"⁹ let alone their domestic legal¹⁰ and political ramifications shall not concern us here.

Certainly the ideological convictions of the neo-conservative elite, Robert Kagan among them, are extremely relevant, and to study their intellectual development is in itself highly rewarding. A common misperception is to regard them as conservative realists. Their agenda is neither conservative nor is it realist.¹¹ As Francis Fukuyama, himself very close to neo-conservative circles, puts it: "In no way do the neo-conservatives want to defend the order of things as they are, *i.e.* founded on hierarchy, tradition, and a pessimistic view of human nature."¹² Unlike realists such as Kissinger¹³ they are not interested in order as such, but as idealists-optimists believe strongly that the political process can be used towards the propagation of normative goals.

They see themselves as "the best and the brightest" of their generation,¹⁴ the intellectual heirs to the academic elite¹⁵ that Kennedy recruited, mainly from Harvard University, in order to challenge orthodoxies and do what is right for America. And just as the circle around McGeorge Bundy and McNamara succeeded in dramatically redrawing American nuclear strategy, their epigones around Perle,

⁹ For a good overview, see, John B. Judis and Spencer Ackerman, *The First Casualty – The Selling of the Iraq War*, THE NEW REPUBLIC (19 June 2003), available at <<http://www.tnr.com/docprint.mhtml?i=20030630&s=ackermanjudis063003>>.

¹⁰ John B. Dean, *Is Lying About the Reason for a War an Impeachable Offense?*, FINDLAW/CNN (6 June 2003), available at <<http://edition.cnn.com/2003/LAW/06/06/findlaw.analysis.dean.wmd/>>.

¹¹ Plenty of textbooks describe the dominant paradigm in international relations, realism, in detail. A useful starting point is MICHAEL JOSEPH SMITH, *REALIST THOUGHT FROM WEBER TO KISSINGER* (1986) ; see, also, Robert Gilpin, *The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism*, in *NEO-REALISM AND ITS CRITICS* (Robert Keohane ed. 1986).

¹² Francis Fukuyama writing in the WALL STREET JOURNAL, 24 December 2002.

¹³ Who famously quipped that if he had to choose between order and justice, he would always choose order.

¹⁴ DAVID HALBERSTAM AND JOHN MCCAIN, *THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST* (2001). In this seminal study Halberstam and McCain (the veteran and later presidential candidate) show how arrogance and "group think" contributed to the tragic American decision to engage in the Vietnam War.

¹⁵ For an extremely insightful intellectual history of the group, see, Alain Frachon and Daniel Vernet, *Le stratège et le philosophe*, LE MONDE (16 April 2003), available, in French, at <<http://www.zeitounatv.com/le%20strategie.html>>, and translated into English, at <<http://www.counterpunch.org/frachon06022003.html>>. For an interesting discussion of the philosophical issues raised by this article, see, the article by its English translator, Norman Madarasz, *Plato, Leo Strauss, and Allan Bloom*, available at <<http://www.counterpunch.org/madarasz06022003.html>>.

Wolfowitz, Kagan, and others have succeeded in radically shifting the foreign policy doctrine and military strategy of the United States. This alone warrants a thorough engagement with their intellectual pedigree.

B. Evolution of Nuclear Strategy

I. Systemic Stability: How to Avoid Nuclear War

1. *The Berlin and Cuban Crises*

The group of intellectuals who made policy under the Kennedy/Johnson administration deserve credit for helping a circumspect President¹⁶ to step away from the brink of nuclear war over Cuba.¹⁷ The dangerous nature of prevailing US military doctrine had already become apparent during the 1961 Berlin crisis and led the Harvard economist Thomas Schelling to rethink the then prevailing nuclear orthodoxy. Commending Schelling's paper to President Kennedy, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy wrote "you will wish to start work on this problem in the Defense Department where there is still a hideous jump between conventional warfare and a single all-out blast."¹⁸ Schelling's initial contribution was to show that the perceived tactical utility of nuclear weapons was extremely limited, their primary purpose being to "up the ante" psychologically:

¹⁶ Throughout the crisis Kennedy showed great restraint and reluctance to act on the suggestion of his military commanders. He was greatly worried about the dangers of miscalculations, and misperception. He was greatly influenced in his thinking by BARBARA TUCHMAN, *THE GUNS OF AUGUST* (1962). Tuchman presents the outbreak of the First World War as an unintended catastrophe where well-meaning politicians seemed to stumble into war through a combination of inflexible and self-fulfilling military doctrines, illusions of grandeur and complexes of inferiority, plain misunderstanding and stupidity. The President is quoted by his brother, Robert Kennedy, in his posthumously published book about the Cuban missile crisis: "...Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* had made a great impression on the President. 'I am not going to follow a course which will allow anyone to write a comparable book about this time, *The Missiles of October*,' [President Kennedy] said to [Robert Kennedy]." ROBERT KENNEDY, *THIRTEEN DAYS: A MEMOIR OF THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS* 127 (1969). Discussed in DAVID M. KUNSMAN AND DOUGLAS B. LAWSON, *A PRIMER ON U.S. STRATEGIC NUCLEAR POLICY* (January 2001). [Sandia Report, (SAND2001-0053) 43-45].

For a discussion of the validity of the thinking presented by Tuchman, see, STEVEN VAN EVERA, *CAUSES OF WAR – POWER AND THE ROOTS OF CONFLICT* (1999) 61-66.

¹⁷ The best account of the thirteen days of nuclear brinkmanship are probably the recently de-classified transcripts of the White House deliberations. See, ERNEST R. MAY AND PHILIP D. ZELIKOW, *THE KENNEDY TAPES: INSIDE THE WHITE HOUSE DURING THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS* (1997); GRAHAM ALLISON & PHILIP D. ZELIKOW, *ESSENCE OF DECISION; EXPLAINING THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS* (2nd ed. 1999).

¹⁸ Bundy to the President, July 21, 1961, National Security Files, Box 318, Index of Weekend Papers, JFK Library, Boston.

"The thesis is that the role of nuclears in Europe should not be to win a grand nuclear campaign, but to pose a higher level of risk to the enemy. ...

The important thing in limited nuclear war is to impress the Soviet leadership with the risk of general war -- a war that may occur whether we or they intend it or not. If nuclear weapons are introduced the main consequence will not be on the battlefield; the main consequence will be the increased likelihood and expectation of general war. ...

The purpose of nuclears is to convince the Soviets that the risk of general war is great enough to outweigh their original tactical objectives but not so great as to make it prudent to initiate it preemptively.

Limited and localized nuclear war is not, therefore, a "tactical" war. However few the nuclears used, and however selectively they are used, their purpose should not be "tactical" because their consequences will not be tactical. With nuclears, it has become a war of nuclear risks and threats at the highest strategic level. It is a war of nuclear bargaining."¹⁹

It is this very understanding, namely that nuclear weapons constitute a class of their own, and that *any* use involves risks "at the *highest strategic level*" that was poorly understood by the military command during the Cuban crisis. The "hideous jump between conventional warfare and a single all-out blast" of the all-or-nothing doctrine²⁰ of "massive retaliation" developed under Eisenhower²¹ presented an

¹⁹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Nuclear Strategy in the Berlin Crisis*, originally published in *WORLD POLITICS*, (1962), reprinted in, MARC TRACHTENBERG (ED.), *THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN STRATEGIC THOUGHT: WRITINGS ON STRATEGY 1961-1969, AND RETROSPECTIVES* (1988).

²⁰ The doctrine is maybe best symbolized in the person of General Curtis LeMay who played a key role in developing the air bombing campaigns against Germany and Japan, including the low-flying incendiary raids on Tokyo, as well as the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He was subsequently given command of the newly created Strategic Air Command where "his strategy was not one of restraint. Should a nuclear war start, LeMay did not believe in holding back some of the stockpile, but rather in delivering the entire stockpile in the first blow, the so-called 'Sunday punch'. ... During the Cuban missile crisis, he advocated attacking Cuba, even after the Soviets had agreed to remove the missiles." KUNSMAN AND LAWSON (note 16), 105. It might be noted that he was the inspiration to the mad general in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Love the Bomb*. His aggressive posture is also well documented in the transcript of the deliberations. See, MAY AND ZELIKOW (note 17).

²¹ Among the main architects is Secretary of State John Foster Dulles who "practiced a type of diplomacy described as "brinkmanship." In the mid-50s he wrote an article in which he said, "If you are afraid to go to the brink, you are lost." In a January, 1954, speech, he outlined the policy of "massive retaliation" in which a U.S. response to aggression would be "at places and with means of our own choosing." See, KUNSMAN AND LAWSON (note 16), 113. One of Dulles main critics was Henry Kissinger who opposed "massive retaliation" in favor of a coordinated conventional *cum* nuclear reaction to aggression coined "flexible response," which he laid out in his 1957 book *NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND FOREIGN POLICY*, and elaborated in his 1960 book *THE NECESSITY FOR CHOICE*, where he argued that massive retaliation was not credible to the Soviets.

extremely limited range of options to President Kennedy, who was desperately trying to avoid the pitfalls of misperception.

2. *Flexibility and Vulnerability*

Two main weaknesses were exemplified through the Cuban missile crisis, namely “the vulnerability of U.S. forces to nuclear attack and the lack of flexibility available for response.”²² The key to creating a stable nuclear posture was the realization by Kahn,²³ Wohlstetter²⁴, Kaufman, Kissinger,²⁵ and Schelling²⁶ that stability was first and foremost established through the credible deterrence of an assured survivable second strike capacity. Nuclear deterrence requires two somewhat contradictory ingredients: the enemy must fear escalation in order to moderate his actions, but this poses the risk that under the security dilemma he might pre-empt an attack to avoid being attacked first. Thus the risk of all-out war must be “great enough to outweigh their original tactical objectives but not so great as to make it prudent to initiate it preemptively.”²⁷

Wohlstetter was instrumental in developing US policy towards proliferation. Unlike other strategists who considered nuclear weapons essentially stabilizing *per se*, and thus advocated their dispersal among many actors,²⁸ Wohlstetter argued for

²² KUNSMAN AND LAWSON (footnote 16, *supra*).

²³ HERMAN KAHN, *ON THERMONUCLEAR WAR* (2nd ed.1969); *THINKING ABOUT THE UNTHINKABLE* (1962); *ON ESCALATION* (1965). On leaving RAND he established the influential Hudson Institute think-tank.

²⁴ A comprehensive list of Albert Wohlstetter’s early writings can be found at <<http://www.rand.org/publications/classics/wohlstetter/>>

²⁵ HENRY KISSINGER, *NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND FOREIGN POLICY* (1957).

²⁶ THOMAS C. SCHELLING, *THE STRATEGY OF CONFLICT*, 1960; *ARMS AND INFLUENCE* (1966).

²⁷ SCHELLING (footnote 19, *supra*).

²⁸ Waltz refers to nuclear weapons as “a great force for peace” and argues for their wide distribution. See, Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory*, in *THE ORIGIN AND PREVENTION OF MAJOR WARS* 39, 48 (Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb eds., 1989); Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better*, *ADELPHI PAPER NO. 171* (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Nuclear Myths and Political Realities*, 84 *AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE REVIEW* 731 (1990); Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Emerging Structure of International Politics*, 18 *INTERNATIONAL SECURITY*, No. 2, 44 (1993). See also, John Mearsheimer, *Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War*, 15 *INTERNATIONAL SECURITY*, No. 1 (Summer 1990); and, more disturbingly, John Mearsheimer, *Why we will soon miss the Cold War*, *ATLANTIC MONTHLY*, 266/2 (August 1990). John Lewis Gaddis attributes the long period of peace in Europe to the stabilizing nature of nuclear weapons. See, JOHN LEWIS GADDIS, *THE LONG PEACE* (1987). He makes the argument that new nuclear actors would soon be “socialized” into the “habit of responsibility,” and argues that more of them make a more stable

a strict limitation of the “nuclear club.” The best way to limit its number was by extending the US nuclear umbrella to states that otherwise might go nuclear.²⁹ He was likewise quite skeptical of disarmament, which he saw as only increasing the ambition of the Soviet Union. His main contribution was his analysis, done while at RAND, that revealed that the Strategic Air Command bomber bases³⁰ and “soft,” *i.e.* non-hardened missile silos, were vulnerable to a Soviet surprise attack.³¹

In his analysis the main threat to stability was the vulnerability of strategic forces thereby giving an undue advantage to the first side to attack.³² This would create a situation where in a crisis each side would be tempted to either “use them or lose them,” thus depriving itself of the strategic retaliatory capability. Therefore a *vulnerable* force could actually *invite aggression* rather than deter it.³³ His policy prescription was therefore to reduce the vulnerability of American forces to a surprise

system. See, John Lewis Gaddis, *Towards the post-Cold War World*, 70 FOREIGN AFFAIRS 102 (Spring 1991); JOHN LEWIS GADDIS, *WE NOW KNOW: RETHINKING COLD WAR HISTORY* (1997).

²⁹ Albert Wohlstetter, *Nuclear Sharing: NATO and the N+1 Country*, 39 FOREIGN AFFAIRS 355 (April 1961). Again this policy is far from self-evident.

³⁰ In the early days of the Cold War the delivery systems for nuclear weapons consisted mainly of traditional bombers.

³¹ The vulnerabilities arose due to the increasing accuracy of nuclear weapons, which now allowed strikes against specific “point” targets such as individual missile silos or air bases, and not only against area targets such as cities.

³² It has been first developed into a fully-fledged theory by Wohlstetter, Hoffmann, and Schelling. See, Albert Wohlstetter and Fred Hoffmann, *Defending a Strategic Force after 1960*, unpublished RAND working paper (1 February 1954); Albert Wohlstetter, *The Delicate Balance of Terror*, 37 FOREIGN AFFAIRS 221 (January 1959); Thomas C. Schelling, *Surprise Attack and Disarmament*, 15 BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTIST 413 (December 1959); Thomas C. Schelling, *Meteors, Mischief, and War*, 16 BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTIST, 292 (September 1960); THOMAS C. SCHELLING, *THE STRATEGY OF CONFLICT* 207-254 (1960); THOMAS C. SCHELLING, *ARMS AND INFLUENCE* 221-259 (1966). For an excellent treatment of the literature, see VAN EVERA (note 16), 35-72, chapter 3, *Jumping the Gun: First-Move Advantage and Crisis Instability*. The general notion that the risk of war rises with the size of the first-strike advantage is a modern one, and might have been the decisive factor in causing the First World War, see, BARRY R. POSEN, *THE SOURCES OF MILITARY DOCTRINE: FRANCE, BRITAIN, AND GERMANY BETWEEN THE WARS* 184 (1984).

³³ He built on the work of his wife, Roberta Wohlstetter, who showed how closely the Pearl Harbour attack resembled a potential Soviet attack on vulnerable strategic nuclear assets, see her *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962. She describes how Admiral Isoroku hoped to “decide the fate of the war on the very first day” and “at the outset of the war give a fatal blow to the enemy fleet”, 368.

attack especially by securing the vulnerable strategic bomber forces, and relying on other less exposed delivery systems.³⁴

3. *Deterring by Reducing Fear*

Schelling disagreed with Wohlstetter's conclusion about the main threat to stability and the implications of that finding for American strategy. In his view, the real threat was psychological, namely the *reciprocal fear of surprise attack* because "the likelihood of war is determined by how great a reward attaches to jumping the gun."³⁵ In a situation of uncertainty and with each side possessing the ability to inflict catastrophic damage on the other side, there is an incentive to strike first in order to avoid being struck. Thus Schelling controversially proposed that the United States should deliberately forego the ability to stage surprise attacks itself, because possessing this ability could cause unintended war.³⁶ The key to systemic stability was, according to Schelling and others, the ability to "ride out" a first strike and still have enough weapons surviving the initial attack to be able to inflict unacceptable damage on the enemy through the possession of a *secure, second strike capability*.

While Schelling and Wohlstetter agreed on reducing the vulnerability of US strategic bomber forces, they sharply disagreed on a range of "counterforce" strategic weapons programs, such as hard-target-killing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and, most saliently, area ballistic missile defenses. Schelling held that weapons systems would confer "a surprise-attack capability that the United States should foreswear for its own safety."³⁷ Schelling, Kissinger, and others eventually developed the so-called "Charles River Doctrine,"³⁸ which incorporated these findings and "argued that the purpose of arms control was not disarmament but stability" by modulating the respective arsenals in a qualitative manner in order to preclude a surprise-attack capability.

³⁴ These were primarily land and sea based missiles. This shift in strategy occurred at the expense of the Air Force, and benefited the Navy and Army. Not surprisingly the commanding officers tried to shape overall strategy in a way that benefited their service most, see the debates between General Curtis LeMay, Admiral Arleigh Burke, and Secretary McNamara.

³⁵ SCHELLING at 235 (footnote 26, *supra*).

³⁶ For a modern variant of this theory see CHARLES GLASER, ANALYSING STRATEGIC NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY (1990), 141-145.

³⁷ VAN EVERA at 36 (footnote 16, *supra*).

³⁸ Named after the Charles River in Cambridge, Mass. along which both Harvard and MIT lie, where the proponents of this school taught.

4. *A New Doctrine*

Based on these findings American strategy was dramatically reformulated under Kennedy/Johnson and as such it remained, in principle, in force until the end of the Cold War. NSC-68, the doctrine that underpinned US strategic thinking since 1950, maintained that nuclear weapons put “a premium on surprise attack” and “a premium on piecemeal aggression,”³⁹ but that had now changed.

The strategy developed under Secretary Robert McNamara was initially called “counterforce,”⁴⁰ which addressed the perceived lack of flexibility of the previous doctrine of “massive retaliation.” When it was realized that the strategy placed no limits on the number of weapons it could necessitate, it was changed again to “mutually assured destruction” (MAD).⁴¹

The strategy holds that given a certain number of *survivable* strategic nuclear weapons, one’s relative security position *vis-à-vis* the enemy would not change irrespective of his attaining ever larger numbers of weapons. Based on Schelling’s insights the ensuing nuclear orthodoxy held that the key to systemic stability was the assured knowledge that each opponent could annihilate the other even after sustaining a mortal blow. As long as that second strike capability was assured, relative shifts in power beyond that make little strategic sense. Khrushchev put it quite aptly: “We’re satisfied to be able to wipe out the United States the first time around. Once is quite enough. What good does it do to annihilate a country two times over?”⁴²

The aim of nuclear strategy was thus no longer to *win* a war, but to render war fighting supremely *illogical* because it would in every conceivable instance be suicidal. Nuclear weapons of a certain type are thus necessary to impress upon the en-

³⁹ THOMAS H. ETZOLD AND JOHN LEWIS GADDIS, *CONTAINMENT: DOCUMENTS ON AMERICAN POLICY AND STRATEGY, 1945-1950* (1978), 414, cited in VAN EVERA at 240 (footnote 16, *supra*).

⁴⁰ The counterforce policy was announced by Secretary McNamara a commencement address for the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Michigan in June 1962.

⁴¹ The term “assured destruction” was coined by McNamara, to which Donald Brennan of the Hudson Institute added the word “mutual.” See, MCGEORGE BUNDY, *DANGER AND SURVIVAL: CHOICES ABOUT THE BOMB IN THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS* 552 (1988). The acronym has, not surprisingly, lent itself to a certain level of sarcasm by opponents of the nuclear arms race. See, e.g., Lewis Mumford, *Gentlemen: You are Mad!*, in *ARMS AND FOREIGN POLICY IN THE NUCLEAR AGE* 391-394 (Milton L. Racove ed., 1972) (although the article had already been written in 1946 before MAD had been formulated).

⁴² NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV, *KHRUSHCHEV REMEMBERS* 517 (Strobe Talbott trans. and ed., 1970).

emy the notion that every attack would result in his own annihilation, thereby effectively deterring any such attempt. But as the Khrushchev quote above indicates, there is a certain finite number and type of weapons required to achieve this level of deterrence. Beyond that *both* sides have a natural interest in limiting the economic, political, and social costs associated with developing and deploying nuclear weapons. Arms control,⁴³ and eventually partial disarmament⁴⁴ are the logical extension of this thinking.

5. Criticism: Winning or Bookkeeping?

The so-called “stability theory”⁴⁵ that underpinned much of the arms control policy debate is based explicitly on Wohlstetter’s original findings of the vulnerability of strategic assets, and on Schelling’s elaboration of the dangers in “jumping the gun” from which he derived an inherent self-interest in removing a surprise-attack capability from one’s own arsenal.⁴⁶ Needless to say, this dominant paradigm was not shared by all. Some doubted its historical accuracy,⁴⁷ while others considered the prime danger identified by the theory, namely pre-emptive war to be exagger-

⁴³ The major arms control treaties are the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaties (SALT I and II, 1972 and 1979; note that SALT II was signed by Carter but that the Senate, during the Reagan administration, failed to ratify it.); the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM 1972); the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT 1996, not yet ratified by the US). For a concise overview of the major strategic legal instruments, see <www.armscontrol.org/pdf/ussovietrussianarms.pdf>; for a comprehensive full-text list refer to see <www.armscontrol.org/treaties>.

⁴⁴ The crucial agreements are the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF 1987; note that this treaty for the first time *eliminated an entire class of weapons*); Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE 1991); Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I 1991 in force 1994, START II 1993, START III, note that START II has been signed in 1993 but the ratification is unclear: U.S ratified 1996, Russia ratified in 2000 but versions are different, and START III not yet been negotiated, so far there has only been the Helsinki Joint Statement 1997), Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT 2002, Russia ratified 2003, US has not yet ratified). Likewise the unilateral reductions announced by President Bush in September 1991, which came to be known as Presidential Nuclear Initiatives (PNI I and II).

⁴⁵ For early adherents of this theory, see, HEDLEY BULL, *THE CONTROL OF THE ARMS RACE* 158-174 (2nd ed., 1965); GLENN H. SNYDER, *DETERRENCE AND DEFENSE: TOWARD A THEORY OF NATIONAL SECURITY* 97-114 (1961); THOMAS C. SCHELLING AND MORTON H. HALPERIN WITH DONALD G. BRENNAN, *STRATEGY AND ARMS CONTROL* 9-17 (1961). The implications of stability theory for US policy are discussed in, Steven E. Miller, *The Limits of Mutual Restraint: Arms Control and the Strategic Balance*, chapter 3 (unpublished Ph.D. diss., Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (1988)). My entire discussion of the theoretical background is heavily based on the work of my teacher. See, VAN EVERA (footnote 16, *supra*).

⁴⁶ See, GLASER (footnote 36, *supra*).

⁴⁷ Stephen Peter Rosen, *Nuclear Arms and Strategic Defense*, 4 WASHINGTON QUARTERLY 82, 83 and 86 (Spring 1981).

ated.⁴⁸ They decried an American "obsession with abstract notions of stability" that has "paralyzed our thinking about nuclear war."⁴⁹ Gray sees this reliance on abstract deductive logic as "the principal intellectual culprit in our pantheon of false strategic gods,"⁵⁰ which perpetuates an "obsolescent"⁵¹ theory. He goes on to boldly ask for thinking about *winning*⁵² not merely bookkeeping a balance sheet of terror.

These ideas were shared to a large extent by Albert Wohlstetter who disagreed strongly with the conclusions drawn by Schelling and others. Wohlstetter and later James Schlesinger,⁵³ among others, considered MAD to be morally wrong, logically inconsistent⁵⁴ and the joint Soviet-American nuclear weapons control system too restraining of America's capabilities.⁵⁵ This school of thought disagreed with the realist orthodoxy⁵⁶ which saw the bipolar confrontation as an essentially structurally driven struggle between two actors whose internal composition was largely irrelevant for managing the stalemate. Taking up earlier ideologically driven conceptions the idea of bipolar stability was explicitly rejected for it was viewed as favoring Soviet aggression: "the 'balance of terror' cannot favor the defense of a

⁴⁸ Dan Reiter, *Exploding the Powderkeg Myth: Pre-emptive Wars almost never Happen*, 20 INTERNATIONAL SECURITY 5, 33 (Fall 1995).

⁴⁹ Rosen at 83 (footnote 48, *supra*).

⁵⁰ Colin S. Gray and Keith B. Paine, *Nuclear Strategy: Is there a Future?*, 6 WASHINGTON QUARTERLY 55, 57 (Summer 1983).

⁵¹ Colin S. Gray, *Strategic Stability Reconsidered*, 109 DAEDALUS 135, 136 (Fall 1980).

⁵² Colin S. Gray, *Nuclear Strategy: A Case for a Theory of Victory*, 4 INTERNATIONAL SECURITY 54 (Summer 1979).

⁵³ James R. Schlesinger, *Rhetoric and Realities in the Star Wars Debate*, 10 INTERNATIONAL SECURITY 3 (Summer 1985).

⁵⁴ See, GREGG HERKEN, COUNSELS OF WAR (1985); KUNSMAN AND LAWSON 115 (footnote 16, *supra*).

⁵⁵ Frachon and Vernet (footnote 15, *supra*).

⁵⁶ There are many variants of realism. In its "classical" guise, writers such as Morgenthau and Carr posit that states seek power as a prime goal because human nature is essentially wicked, whatever political form the government takes. See, HANS J. MORGENTHAU, *POLITICS AMONG NATIONS* (5th ed., 1948/1979); E.H. CARR, *THE TWENTY YEARS' CRISIS* (1940). "Neorealists" or "Structural Realists," such as Waltz and Mearsheimer, however, do not make claims about human nature but maintain that it is the anarchical structure of the international system that forces states as self-help actors to seek *security* (not power) as a prime goal: "conflict is common among states because the international system creates powerful incentives for aggression." John Mearsheimer, *Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War*, 15 INTERNATIONAL SECURITY 5, 12 (Summer 1990). See, also, KENNETH WALTZ, *THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS* (1979).

democratic alliance. Sooner or later, it will favor those most at ease with, those most experienced in, the systematic use of terror."⁵⁷

II. Achieving Supremacy: How to Win Nuclear War

1. *Changes in Doctrine under Reagan*

Thus in the early 1980s calls were made to reopen the debate⁵⁸ from the beginning of the nuclear age of devising strategies of winning a potential contest.⁵⁹ The effects of nuclear war on American society were no longer seen as necessarily apocalyptic: "[nuclear war] would be a terrible mess, but it wouldn't be unmanageable."⁶⁰ Another Reagan administration official remarked that "if there are enough shovels to go around, everybody's going to make it" through a thermonuclear confrontation by building many self-made shelters etc. and that the effects of such a war could be overcome in two to four years.⁶¹ Thus the underlying assumptions of stability theory and MAD were challenged by claiming that "victory is possible" in a nuclear war.⁶² Such wars were no longer seen as fundamentally irrational or suicidal, but it was claimed that they could be won or lost⁶³ depending on the resolve, and capability of the opponents.⁶⁴

In 1977 Richard Pipes argued that "a coalition of groups" were suppressing the outcome of the Strategic Bombing Survey which claimed that nuclear weapons did *not* constitute a revolution in military affairs, stressing their war-fighting potential. Pipes confronted the view that nuclear weapons were "the 'absolute weapon' that had, in large measure, rendered traditional military establishments redundant and

⁵⁷ Quoted in BUNDY at 576 (footnote 42, *supra*).

⁵⁸ Spurgeon Keeny and Wolfgang Panofsky, *MAD vs NUTS*, 60 FOREIGN AFFAIRS 287 (Winter 1981/82).

⁵⁹ For an overview of the theoretical debates about policy, see, HERKEN (footnote 55, *supra*).

⁶⁰ Louis Giuffrida, head of the Federal Emergency Management agency under Reagan, quoted, in ROBERT SCHEER WITH NARDA ZACHINO AND CONSTANCE MATTHIESSEN, *WITH ENOUGH SHOVELS: REAGAN, BUSH, AND NUCLEAR WAR 1* (1982).

⁶¹ Thomas K. Jones, deputy undersecretary of defense under Reagan, quoted *id.*, at 18, 23, 25.

⁶² Colin S. Gray and Keith Paine, *Victory is Possible*, 39 FOREIGN POLICY 14 (Summer 1980).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, at 14.

⁶⁴ To be sure, there were Soviet thinkers who likewise believed that a nuclear war could be fought and won, see for instance N.B. Karabanov and V. F. Khalipov, *The Modern Era and Problems of War and Peace*, in THE PHILOSOPHICAL HERITAGE OF V.I. LENIN AND PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY WAR 7, 17 (Major-General A.S. Milovidov and Colonel V. G. Kozlov eds., 1972, trans. US Air Force, 1974).

traditional strategic thinking obsolete.” He charged that Russian nuclear strategists had always held to the traditional view that the aim of strategy was to ensure victory. He put the unhealthy American acceptance of deterrence and mutually assured destruction to the undue influence of this coalition.⁶⁵

With the advent of the Reagan administration these views found much credence in government. President Reagan held distinct views on the nature of the struggle in which the United States was engaged, and he explicitly rejected the value-neutral realist position.⁶⁶ His National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) 13 issued in 1981 explicitly broke with the hitherto accepted orthodoxy of American nuclear strategy:

“It differed somewhat from PD-59 in that instead of denying victory to the Russians, its goal was a decisive U.S. victory. Such a victory might only occur after months, even years, of nuclear exchanges. The mention of “prevailing” over the Soviets in a nuclear war was explicitly reintroduced into NSDD-13, after having been removed from plans during the Kennedy years.”^{67 68}

Wohlstetter had never accepted the “doctrine of mutually assured destruction,” which he considered it to be ineffective, as well as immoral. His concerns were now taken up in the Reagan administration’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). Initially the Reagan administration contended itself with continuing the massive military build-up begun under Carter. In 1983 Reagan announced the SDI initiative, which found formal expression in NSDD-85 establishing the SDI research initiative.

2. Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense

SDI had multiple aims. The officially proffered reason was to protect American population centers against possible attack, whether a first-strike or retaliatory in character. It explicitly condemns the strategic thinking behind MAD as immoral.

⁶⁵ Richard Pipes, *Why the Soviet Union Thinks It Could Fight and Win a Nuclear War*, COMMENTARY (July 1977).

⁶⁶ Best exemplified maybe in his “evil empire” speech 1983.

⁶⁷ KUNSMAN AND LAWSON 64 (footnote 16, *supra*) (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ PD-59 had been issued by Harold Brown, Secretary of Defense under Carter, and aimed at countering the large Soviet technological advances and weapon deployments made while the United States was politically paralyzed by the Watergate scandal, and militarily occupied by first waging and then extricating themselves from the Vietnam War. Brown explained it as “a strategy that denies the other side any possibility that it could win—but it doesn’t say that our side would win.” KUNSMAN AND LAWSON 59 (footnote 16, *supra*).

Nuclear stability as it is conceived under MAD is based explicitly on holding each other's population centers hostage. Moreover, as Schelling and others had argued, systemic stability crucially depended on populations remaining vulnerable. The reasoning behind the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 was based on the necessity of maintaining parity between the superpowers:

*"A comprehensive and effective ABM system in one superpower would have defeated the deterrence mechanism by tempting that state to strike first and hunker down behind its shield, which, in theory, would cause the second striker's nuclear missiles to bounce off harmlessly. The mere deployment of a significant ABM could revive the need for strategic anticipatory self-defense [by the side not having the ABM]."*⁶⁹

What thinkers such Wohlstetter and Schlesinger had always maintained, was now enthusiastically taken up by the Reagan administration. In this view American policy makers bear a primary responsibility for protecting the American people. If there were technological ways of doing this, it would be fundamentally immoral to refrain from deploying such means for the sake of an abstract and unproven principle such as MAD.

But SDI had two more aims that were less openly spoken about. On the one hand it constituted an attempt to change the status of nuclear weapons as "the 'absolute weapon' that had, in large measure, rendered traditional military establishments redundant and traditional strategic thinking obsolete." SDI was thus part of a strategic revision to make superpower war winnable.

On the other hand, SDI addressed the challenge that Wohlstetter and others had made from the 1960s onward: by submitting to arms control measures, the US was tying its hands and renouncing its comparative strength. Rather than accepting an artificial parity that allowed the weaker side to catch breath economically, the economically and technologically superior United States should decide the battleground.⁷⁰ If the US is strong in technological innovation, then it should force the Soviets to take up that challenge. Given its much stronger industrial and economic base, it would be in a much better position to withstand the cost of such a confrontation. Many associated with the Reagan/Bush Sr. administrations have thus argued that it was their military aggressiveness towards the Soviet Union in the 1980s that convinced Gorbachev to step down. The argument appears in two guises, one portraying it as a battle of will and determination, not unlike a "game of chicken," the other as having basically "outspent" the Soviet Union. On account of the "paper

⁶⁹ Michael Reisman, *Editorial Comment*, 82 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL LAW 82, 85 (2003).

⁷⁰ Inspiration for this position was found in the ancient Chinese military thinker SUN TZU, *THE ART OF WAR* (translated Samuel B. Griffith, 1963).

trail" in the Soviet leadership, however, these self-congratulatory interpretations appear somewhat doubtful.⁷¹

Neo-conservatives in Government

I. Unfinished Business

The Reagan administration's strategic redirection allowed Wohlstetter who had left government side-tracked in 1974 to teach mathematics at the University of Chicago, to return to counseling government. It is the circle around Wohlstetter's former students and protégés, Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz for example, who were given their first governmental responsibilities under Reagan, and who since joining the Bush Jr. administration have pursued that radical policy of putting America first. What we are currently witnessing under the management of the neo-conservatives is a major reappraisal of US foreign policy and "grand strategy" with radical changes being made to force posture, military doctrine, and procurement. Its importance cannot be underestimated. The views espoused in the current National Security Strategy of the United States⁷² depart so radically from previous orthodoxy that they can only be likened to the seminal shift achieved by NSC-68 under the Truman administration,⁷³ or the reappraisal under Secretary McNamara of the nuclear concepts of "flexible response" and second strike "counterforce."

Obviously such fundamental reappraisals have a rather long gestation period. The ideas that found their way into the present National Security Strategy were largely formulated while its principal authors were out of office. Dissatisfied with the Pentagon's Quadrennial Defense Review (May 1997) and the report of the National Defense Panel (December 1997) a group of former Department of Defense advisors formed the Project for a New American Century in 1997. As they put it:

"In broad terms, we saw the project as building upon the defense strategy outlined by the Cheney Defense Department in the waning days of the Bush Administration. The Defense Policy Guidance (DPG) drafted in the early months of 1992 provided a blueprint for main-

⁷¹ See, e.g., GEORGI ARBATOV, *THE SYSTEM: AN INSIDER'S LIFE IN SOVIET POLITICS* 321-322 (1992) (arguing that American aggressiveness delayed reform and strengthened hard-liners).

⁷² <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html>>

⁷³ NSC-68 was an attempt to devise a foreign policy in a world that could be armed with thermonuclear bombs. Its principal author, Admiral Nitze pointed out that Soviet leaders would favor preventive war if they thought the U.S. was weak, either militarily or in will: "the enemy's perception of American strength and will was as important as their reality in the great power game." See, KUNSMAN AND LAWSON at 118 (footnote 16, *supra*). See, also, ERNEST R. MAY, *AMERICAN COLD WAR STRATEGY: INTERPRETING NSC 68* (1993).

*taining U.S. preeminence, precluding the rise of a great power rival, and shaping the international security order in line with American principles and interests. Leaked before it had been formally approved, the document was criticized as an effort by "cold warriors" to keep defense spending high and cuts in forces small despite the collapse of the Soviet Union; not surprisingly, it was subsequently buried by the new administration."*⁷⁴

The Bush Jr. presidency brought many neo-conservative thinkers back into government, and, more importantly, left many of the traditional conservative foreign policy elite tied to realism and *realpolitik* out, people such as Kissinger, James Baker, Nixon, and even Bush Sr. Apart from Wohlstetter's belief in expanding the freedom of action of American foreign policy and buttressing its hegemony, another intellectual strain is evident in neo-conservative thinking.

II. Morality of Power

It can be traced to the German-born Chicago philosopher Leo Strauss who taught many of them. To sum up his rather complex thinking, he believed in two things: that justice without power is meaningless, and that modernity had the tendency to cause a rejection of moral values that he saw as the basis of democracy.

Having lived through the rise of Nazism, Strauss concluded that dictatorships were expansionist by their very nature and thus had to be confronted by a democracy by resorting to force: "All in all, Weimar showed the spectacle of justice without force, or of a justice incapable of resorting to force."⁷⁵

Strauss strongly objected to the kind of moral relativism that called for a moral equivalence between American democracy and Soviet communism. Strauss strongly argued that political thought must not shy away from casting value judgements. Political regimes are not all alike, good ones have the capacity to form their subjects in progressive ways, while bad ones bring out the worst in human nature. It is thus an explicit rejection of realist dogma that starts from the essential depravity of man, and maintains that all actors within the system share fundamentally the same interests as determined by the anarchic structure of the system. Thus while realism has no place for *justice* and urges restraint and moderation in order to achieve *order* in a stable system, Strauss considers order without justice as not

⁷⁴ THOMAS DONELLY ET AL., REBUILDING AMERICA'S DEFENSES - STRATEGY, FORCES AND RESOURCES FOR A NEW CENTURY ii. (September 2000),

⁷⁵ Foreword to LEO STRAUSS, RELIGIONSKRITIK SPINOZAS ALS GRUNDLAGE SEINER BIBELWISSENSCHAFT, English: SPINOZA'S CRITIQUE OF RELIGION, (trans. by E.M. Sinclair, 1997).

worth having. In his view good regimes have the right –even the duty– to defend themselves against evil ones.

This string of thought is not entirely novel, and we can detect its pedigree in conservative writing on revolution. Edmund Burke's writings on the French revolution centered not so much on the military threat the Republic would be able to muster soon through revolutionary zeal and *levee en masse*. It concentrated on the *ideological* challenge that the established monarchies in Europe must not allow to pass unpunished. He argued that collaborating with a "regicide directory" would irredeemably tarnish the legitimacy of the established regimes, and thus urged them to use military force to remove the usurpers from power.⁷⁶ A very similar line of argument was advanced *vis-à-vis* the young Soviet Union, revolutionary Cuba, and the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁷⁷

Strauss argues not so much within the context of an established order that is threatened by revolutionary upheaval, but makes a more basic argument. If there is a difference between good and bad regimes, good regimes should not tie their hands behind their back when dealing with bad regimes, revolutionary or tyrannical. Using the language of ancient Greece, he preferred to speak of "tyrannies" rather than of dictatorships, he saw the world in Manichean terms, democracies could not and should not do business with tyrannies.

Likewise the rules of international law protecting the sovereign equality of all states are inapplicable when dealing with non-democracies for democracies have the right and indeed the duty to defend themselves, even to propagate their system by force; "it would be simplistic to immediately transpose this idea with the 'axis of evil' denounced by George W. Bush. But it is very clear, indeed, that it proceeds from the same source."⁷⁸ The importance of political regimes in shaping the character of people (in clear rejection of the pessimist realist view of human nature⁷⁹), the exuberant celebration of American values and its particular form of democracy, the importance attached to the militant defense and external propagation of these val-

⁷⁶ Edmund Burke, *Three Letters to a Member of the Present Parliament, on the Proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France*, in *SELECT WORKS OF EDMUND BURKE* (Francis Canavan ed., 1999).

⁷⁷ Note for instance the book by Khalilzad who is now George Bush's Special Envoy to Iraq, CHERYL BENARD AND ZALMAY KHALILZAD, "THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD": IRAN'S ISLAMIC REPUBLIC (1984).

⁷⁸ FRACHON AND VERNET (footnote 15, *supra*).

⁷⁹ See, e.g., KENNETH WALTZ, *MAN, THE STATE AND WAR* (1954).

ues, and the steadfast opposition to dictatorships⁸⁰ mark Straussian thinking, and have come to define the creed of the neo-conservatives.

III. After the Cold-War: What Next?

The inauguration of George Bush was thus seen as an opportunity to finally deal with two developments in the post-Cold War era that American strategic thinking had failed to address adequately. On the one hand, America was now the sole superpower with an unprecedented preponderance of power. But military doctrine and strategic thinking lagged somewhat behind this fact. No single academic school of thought had been able to dominate US foreign policy thinking in the post-Cold War decade. The resulting policy was thus often criticized for lacking consistency, clarity, and sense of purpose.

On the other hand, it was widely perceived that the very concept of *deterrence* had lost much of its utility after the demise of the Soviet Union. Although official US doctrine under Clinton continued to rely on deterrence as its key concept, doubts were voiced whether it adequately addressed the new kinds of threats faced by the US.

1. *The Clinton Reversal*

Superseding Reagan's NSDD-13, a new nuclear policy⁸¹ was approved by President Clinton in 1997, which, in the words of a high-ranking official, "recognizes that we're at the end of the Cold War and that nuclear weapons now play a smaller role in our nuclear strategy than at any point during the nuclear era." He also stated: "most notably the PDD removes from presidential guidance all previous references to being able to wage a nuclear war successfully or to prevail in a nuclear war... The emphasis in this PDD is therefore on deterring nuclear wars or the use of nuclear weapons at any level, not fighting [with] them."⁸²

Thus while the importance of nuclear weapons was downplayed, the continued reliance of the US on nuclear deterrence found expression in the *National Security Strategy* released by the White House in December 1999:

⁸⁰ This is a marked departure from realist thinking in both Republican and Democratic administrations, epitomized in Roosevelt's quip about a Central American dictator: "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch." See, *inter alia*, Charles Krauthammer, *The Clinton Doctrine*, CNN/ALLPOLITICS (29 March 1999), <<http://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/time/1999/03/29/doctrine.html>>

⁸¹ President Clinton approved Presidential Defense Directive PDD-60 on 13 Nov 1997.

⁸² Robert G. Bell, senior director for defense policy at the National Security Council, in the WASHINGTON POST p. 1 (7 December 1997).

*"Our nuclear deterrent posture is one example of how U.S. military capabilities are used effectively to deter aggression and coercion against U.S. interests. Nuclear weapons serve as a guarantee of our security commitments to allies and a disincentive to those who would contemplate developing or otherwise acquiring their own nuclear weapons. ... The United States will continue to maintain a robust triad of strategic nuclear forces sufficient to deter any potential adversaries...."*⁸³

2. The Failure of Deterrence

To a large extent this was an explicit renunciation of the changes made under Reagan/Bush Sr. towards making nuclear weapons "useable" and superpower wars "winnable." This in itself probably did not find the unquestioned adulation of those officials that had been instrumental in drafting the Reagan doctrine. But what they considered more worrisome was the perceived failure of the Clinton administration to address the new threats faced by the United States:

*"Deterrence worked in the past because we understood much about those we were deterring, retired Air Force General Larry Welch told a Senate hearing last week. The US knew what the Soviet leadership valued. US commanders had high confidence that they could hold those assets at risk—and the Soviets knew it. Such mutual understanding doesn't exist between the US and North Korea, or the US and Iraq, or the US and Iran. If these states of concern (formerly called "rogue states" by the State Department) develop nuclear missiles capable of reaching the US, traditional deterrence may not stop them from pushing the button. "I simply do not know what deters those particular kinds of threats," said Welch."*⁸⁴

These threats from states whose leadership was viewed as essentially irrational, for reasons of personal delusion or ideological fanaticism, could not be deterred by threatening their valued assets. The theory of deterrence is a highly complex subject matter⁸⁵ but its most basic ingredient is the assumption of rationality on behalf of the enemy and that there are certain assets that he values and that can be targeted in order to make him pliable. In George's definition a strategy of "forceful persuasion" involves the threat of force or the limited use of *exemplary* force to *persuade* an opponent to stop or undo an aggressive action, *rather than bludgeon him into stop-*

⁸³ KUNSMAN AND LAWSON at 68 (footnote 16, *supra*).

⁸⁴ Peter Grier, *The End of a Defense Doctrine*, THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR p. 1 (7 July 2000) (quoted in KUNSMAN AND LAWSON at (footnote 16, *supra*)).

⁸⁵ For a short introduction, see, ALEXANDER GEORGE, *FORCEFUL PERSUASION* (1995).

ping.⁸⁶ It is thus a *diplomatic* rather than a military strategy to achieve a *peaceful* solution.

3. *Bringing Missile Defense Back In*

As mentioned earlier, the protection against incoming ballistic missiles, which was to be provided by SDI, was deemed crucial by the conservative elite for a number of reasons, including moral ones. The failure of SDI was due not only to the enormous technical difficulties, but also to the economies of offensive weapons.⁸⁷ Thus the initial ambitious plan had to be abandoned, but the project *per se* stayed on the agenda, now in the form of a less comprehensive National Missile Defense System. Republican congressmen tried to put in an amendment to H.R. 1530, the Defense Authorization Bill for fiscal year 1996, that required the establishment of such a system by the year 2003.

President Clinton vetoed the bill on 28 December 1995, in part because he disagreed with the reasoning behind this amendment, which according to him addresses a "long-range threat that our Intelligence Community does not foresee in the coming decade."⁸⁸ The assessment to which Clinton was referring was contained in the classified National Intelligence estimate NIE-95-19, released in November 1995 and entitled *Emerging Missile Threat to North America During the Next 15 Years*. It held⁸⁹ that it was "extremely unlikely" that ICBM technology could simply be bought from, say Russia or China by 'rogue states'; that the US would be able to detect any indigenous attempts at developing such delivery systems "many years in advance"; and that no "country, other than the major declared nuclear powers, will develop or otherwise acquire a ballistic missile in the next 15 years that will threaten the contiguous 48 States or Canada."

⁸⁶ *Id.*

⁸⁷ Basically, it is much cheaper to deploy offensive weapons than to create a reliable defensive mechanism against them. In the early 1960s the cost-exchange ratio between antimissile defenses and offsetting responses was estimated at 5:1. In the debate over SDI this ratio was still estimated at 3:1, "the ratio is still strongly weighted against defense and will remain so." James R. Schlesinger, *Rhetoric and Realities in the Star Wars Debate*, 10 *INTERNATIONAL SECURITY* 3, 8 (Summer 1985), discussed in VAN EVERA at 251 fn. 27 (footnote 16, *supra*).

⁸⁸ Quoted in the Senate debate over the adoption of the Rumsfeld Commission Report 1998, *see*, <www.fas.org/irp/congress/1998_cr/s980731-rumsfeld.htm>.

⁸⁹ As reported to congressmen in a letter by the CIA's Congressional Relations Office of 1 December 1995, quoted *ibid.*

4. *The Rumsfeld Report*

Republican congressmen were not happy with that conclusion, and there were some indications⁹⁰ that the findings were controversial. Thus a bipartisan commission of inquiry under former Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld was appointed to deliver a second opinion. The Rumsfeld Commission delivered its report⁹¹ on 15 July 1998 and, not surprisingly, disagreed sharply with findings of NIE-95-19. It unanimously concluded that: (a) the missile threat to the US is real and growing; (b) the threat is greater than previously assessed; and (c) the US would have little or no warning of new threats. Thus North Korea, Iran, and Iraq would be able to inflict major destruction on the U.S. within about five years of a decision to acquire such a capability. It further stated that "the threat to the U.S. posed by these emerging capabilities is broader, more mature, and evolving more rapidly than has been reported in estimates by the Intelligence Community."⁹²

The reasons behind these vastly different findings lie obviously to some extent in the political agenda of those drafting the report. But it also started from other assumptions: (a) it included threats to Alaska and Hawaii (which could be reached by North Korean missiles already in 1995); (b) it included a wider range of classified material than the previous study; (c) it recognized that missile development in the Third World no not follow the pattern established by the US and the Soviet Union, basically rely on much less testing and are thus more difficult to detect; (d) it placed a higher premium on the risks associated with foreign assistance and technology transfer; and (e) it underscored the aggressive "denial and deception" programs, which reduced US insight into the status of their missile programs.

While the report remained largely inconsequential during the Clinton administration, it is not at all surprising that the new Republican government set out to implement its findings fully. Especially if we bear in mind that two of its members were now Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense.⁹³ Given the added fear that most of these new threats emanated from states or non-state groups that were

⁹⁰ The General Accounting Office prepared a report, and two former Directors of Central Intelligence, Jim Woolsey and Bob Gates offered their opinions which concluded that the level of certainty stated in NIE-95-19 was "overstated" and that it was "politically naïve".

⁹¹ The text can be found at <www.fas.org/irp/threat/missile/rumsfeld/>. For a summary of its key findings see www.cdiss.org/98july2.htm.

⁹² KUNSMAN AND LAWSON at 67 (footnote 16, *supra*).

⁹³ The Commission's members were: Donald H. Rumsfeld, Barry M. Clechman, General Lee Butler, Richard I. Garwin, William R. Graham, William Schneider Jr., General Larry D. Welch, Paul D. Wolfowitz, and James Woolsey.

deemed to be quite resistant to deterrence, the new emphasis on proactive engagement with such threats becomes understandable.

5. Unique Responsibilities, Exceptional Rights

From the perceived need for proactive engagement born out of the alleged failure of deterrence vis-a-vis the new types of opponents, sprang a much more aggressive foreign policy posture. As Kagan points out quite forcefully, the unique position of the United States does not make it uniquely powerful, but also the supreme target for all kinds of discontents. As the sole superpower, the US thus bears unique responsibilities and vulnerabilities that call for a concerted response. Because other states neither have the capacity to constrain the US nor to assist it in discharging its unique responsibilities, it would be unwise to let itself become tied down by an undue reliance on international rules and institutions.

While the US certainly has the capabilities to deal with these responsibilities effectively, it has hitherto lacked the clear political will to do so and the strategic vision to guide its armed forces through the complicated missions that lie ahead. The September attacks proved to this circle how salient their concerns about “unorthodox” threats had been, and that the US essentially lacked a clear policy to address these. Given the enormous repercussion the attacks have had on American society, the administration found itself endowed with an unprecedented mandate to implement ideas that it had incubated for a long time. What marks the neo-conservative revolution is thus not so much the work of a narrow group of conspirators, but the concerted effort by highly determined policy professionals to exploit an unprecedented period of a high sense of urgency, immense military capacity, and domestic political opportunity to carry out policies that it had been advocating for more than two decades.

D. Conclusion

Resembling the attitude of the those intellectuals who set out to come up with a doctrine to guide US policy through the emerging nuclear confrontation of the 1950s and 1960s, the neo-conservative academic-practitioners deliberately set out to “think the unthinkable.” Much of the rhetoric that has proved to be particularly irksome to Europeans stems from this – in itself laudable and admirable – attitude to question every single piece of received wisdom in lights of its perceived utility towards improving the United States’ security position. After a prolonged period of complacency and inaction in strategic thinking, they quite self-consciously set out to pursue a revolutionary reappraisal of US interests and strategy. They were guided by a firm belief in the superiority of the American experience with democracy, and the dangers inherent in normative relativism and complacency.